



*by Carol Brinkman, HCMG*

## Keeping the Deer Away

Deer are beautiful animals and the Hill Country of Texas abounds with deer. Except in times of severe drought, the deer have plenty to eat courtesy of Mother Nature. However, your garden is a smorgasbord of exotic dishes to taste. Can you blame the deer when they venture into your garden for this feast? Short of eight-foot fencing and a moat around your house, there is no sure way to protect your landscape. Here are four strategies that will help deter deer. Just keep in mind, that when food grows scarce in their natural habitat, the deer will eat almost anything – there is no absolutely deer-resistant plant.

### **Don't tempt them!**

If you've had trouble with deer, you already know the plants they love. Fortunately, there are some plants deer seem to dislike. Generally speaking, these include most thorny plants and those with fuzzy or leathery leaves or, as is the case of rosemary officinalis, some strong-scented plants. Bear in mind that the hungrier they are, the less selective they'll be, and no plant is absolutely deer-proof. Have I mentioned that?

### **Eww. . .that's awful!**

Sometimes a little deterrent is needed to keep them away. Repellents discourage deer from feeding because they have either a bad taste or smell, i.e. rotten eggs or garlic. There are various recipes for homemade deterrents as well as commercially available repellents. Generally these work when you don't have many deer or early on when the deer first discover your landscape. Repellents can be moderately successful if they are (and must be) re-applied faithfully.

### **Boo!**

Sudden, unexpected noises can send a deer running; however, they will quickly become accustomed to the noise. Moving the sound devices around in your garden may extend the time during which these devices will be successful. There also are motion-activated devices that fire a spray of water at the intruders. These seem to be more successful than the sound devices and have become more reasonably priced now days. Mine was a Christmas gift that (knock wood) keeps on giving.

### **No trespassing!**

Fencing is the most permanent and reliable deer control solution. To be effective fencing needs be at least 7 feet tall. This option is not only an investment, but often the layout of your property or your landscape design make this impossible. Sometimes there are homeowner association, or local, laws/rules that do not allow fencing. If such is the case in your neighborhood, you might want to suggest that feeding the deer should not be allowed as well. Feeding the deer has resulted in the over-population and weakened condition of many deer. Survival of the fittest should apply here. Another alternative would be wrapping particularly vulnerable shrubs with black nylon netting or other such materials found at your local garden center. This can be a useful technique to reduce winter browsing, but it defeats the purpose of your beautifully designed landscape. However, fabric or shade netting would be a good option for your vegetable garden to deter deer as well as birds.